New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1953

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
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NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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Listed alphabetically are the names of actors and actresses in shows opening during the year 1953. The number opposite the name indicates the pages on which each is found in NEW YORK THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS. We regret that we cannot include the various cast changes, but can only give the opening night casts as published in the New York newspapers.

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"The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker"

The New York Times

December 31, 1953

Liam O'Brien's 'Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker,' a Family Comedy at the Coronet

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Given a thoroughly improbable situation, the author and actors of "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" have put together an uproarious show. Liam O'Brien is the author. Burgess Meredith and Martha Scott are the actors who are starred, although Glenn Anders as a pickle-puss parson ought to rank at least as a comet. Pooling their senses of humor, they have come up with a farce-comedy that filled the Coronet Theatre with laughter last evening.

It is set in a rococo living-room in Wilmington, Del., in 1890. In terms of that period Mr. Pennypacker is a progressive—a member of the Darwin and Henry George societies, a leading light in the Society to Persuade Bernard Shaw to Visit the United States, a free-thinker and a proponent of nudism.

* * *

In the course of the first act, it appears that Mr. Pennypacker is even more remarkable than that. He has a family of nine children in Philadelphia in addition to the eight in Wilmington. Prudish people would call Mr. Pennypacker a bigamist. Mr. O'Brien, as the author, is several times on the point of branding him with that word.

But Mr. O'Brien, it turns out, has a streak of sentiment as well as a sense of humor. And the delight of "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" is the relish and the resourcefulness with which he translates his theme into a warm-hearted, old-fashioned comedy compounded of ingenious though crack-brained arguments, bruised feelings, broken hearts, ultimatums and a long series of hysterical crises.

* * *

Since Mr. Pennypacker has two families, there does not seem to be any solution to Mr. O'Brien's situation. But trust an Irishman. When everything looks hopeless, Mr. O'Brien supplies the kind of solution that would melt the hardest heart. Probably it would not be cricket to describe the device here by which Mr. O'Brien pulls down his last curtain on a joyous situation.

The play is not only jovial, but eminently actable, too. And Alan Schneider has directed a turbulent, closely woven performance that keeps the amusement flowing across the stage. Ben Edwards' elaborate setting, showing interior and exterior, and his period costumes give the play some of the fond innocence of a departed era.

Mr. Meredith returns to the stage in a very funny and lovable performance as a good-hearted rebel who has talked himself out of so many situations in the past that he expects to keep succeeding. As an embattled leader of thought, soothing the injured and disarming the enemy, Mr. Meredith plays broad comedy with a lot of tenderness and charm. It is a performance that is thoroughly involved in the rumpus of the plot.

As the wife and mother confronted with a staggering situation, Miss Scott gives a beautiful, willowy performance with plenty of spirit blazing up through it. The long cast includes a number of other actors who are alert and captivating at the same time—Una Merkel, Phyllis Love, Michael Wager and Roger Stevens. But Thomas Chalmers deserves a word of gratitude for his choleric grandfather who shouts down the opposition and wields a merciless cane.

And Mr. Anders' cartoon of a startled parson is the most consistently funny item in the performance. It ranges from sickening piety to pompousness and terror; it never relapses into any of the stock attitudes for this character. Note especially Mr. Anders' unctuous entrance when butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

* * *

No doubt the theme of "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" looks rigid and mechanical. But Mr. O'Brien writes with relish and with considerable warmth, too. And crazy as his comedy is, it also makes some sensible statements about the advanced intellectual whose logic is inhuman. Amid the gaiety, some reasonable decisions are made. Happily, they are pretty well lost amid the uproar and astonishment of a lusty stage performance. For everything in "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" is drenched with laughter.

"THE REMARKABLE MR. PENNYPACKER"

Comedy by Liam O'Brien; staged by Alan Schneider; settings and costumes by Ben Edwards; presented by Robert Whitehead and Roger L. Stevens as the initial offering of Producers' Theatre, at the Coronet Theatre, December 30, 1953. The cast:

Laurie Pennypacker.....Nancy Devlin
First Pupil.....Betty Lou Keim
Second Pupil.....Kathleen Gately
Ben Pennypacker.....Billy Quinn
David Pennypacker.....Lewis Scholle
Edward Pennypacker.....Jackie Scholle
Elizabeth Pennypacker.....Roni Dengel
Aunt Jane Pennypacker.....Una Merkel
Wilbur Fifield...Michael Wager
Kate Pennypacker..Phyllis Love
Ma Pennypacker...Martha Scott
Henry Pennypacker..John Reese
Teddie Pennypacker.....Joel Crothers
Grampa Pennypacker.....Thomas Chalmers
Quinlan.....William Lanteau
A Young Man.....Roger Stevens
Dr. Fifield.....Glenn Anders
Sheriff.....Howard Fischer
Pa Pennypacker.....Burgess Meredith
Policeman.....James Holden

DAILY NEWS

December 31, 1953

Year '54 Can Enter Laughing With The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The theatrical year of 1953 had its own little New Year's Eve party last evening, one night ahead of schedule, at the luxuriously furnished Coronet Theatre—and it was a happy celebration. The festivity involved the opening of a comedy by Liam O'Brien titled "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker." The play may run down a bit now and then, and O'Brien really doesn't know how to get his characters out of the mess he got them into; but, even so, "Pennypacker" at its best is hilarious and most of the rest of the time it is funny—and it has a fine big cast of first-grade comedians.

The comedy, set in Wilmington, Del., in 1890 is a "Life With Father" in spades. Here in Wilmington in a fascinating house designed by Ben Edwards, dwell all the Pennypackers, well-to-do porkpackers who have a Philadelphia branch. Included in the tribe are a wife, eight boys and girls, a maiden aunt and—every other month—the head of the house, Horace Pennypacker Jr. As if these weren't enough to keep things lively, the homestead is frequently invaded by Grandpa, Horace Sr., an angry old coot in gray mutton-chop whiskers.

Has New Ideas.

The junior Pennypacker is the remarkable one. He embarrasses his children by wearing odd clothing, just as Socrates did—in this case, knickers, a Norfolk jacket and a cap. He tends to the pork business well enough, alternating between the Philadelphia and Wilmington branches, and he is a radical. He believes in Thoreau, Henry George and votes for women.

Toward the end of the first act, when a nice and timid youth comes to the Wilmington house looking for his father, it becomes apparent that Pennypacker Jr. also has had strong beliefs in Philadelphia—has had, indeed, another house, another wife and nine boys and girls as a branch establishment.

This is a funny situation and the author makes a great deal of fun out of it—and some witty comment, too. The witty comment comes mostly from long arguments between the free-thinking doubledaddy and an exceptionally proper Episcopalian minister, whose young son, also a member of the cloth, is about to marry the eldest daughter in the Wilmington household. Mr. O'Brien's ending is inconclusive—but since I can't think of a better ending I should allow the one at the Coronet to stand and be grateful for the year-end laughter I've enjoyed.

Ebullient Acting.

The acting is ebullient and the stage movement, under the direction of Alan Schneider, is cheerfully turbulent. As Grandpa Pennypacker, Thomas Chalmers is a fabulously lovable old crosspatch. As Horace Jr., the man with high ideals, a high output and low morals, Burgess Meredith is busy, slippery and persuasive. As the minister, Glenn Anders is giving the funniest performance of his career. There are charming performances by Martha Scott as the wife and Una Merkel as the aunt, and the younger generation includes such attractive players as Nancy Devlin, Michael Wager and Roger Stevens.

"The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" makes a fine initial production for the newly organized Producers' Theatre, which consists of Robert Whitehead, Roger L. Stevens and Robert Dowling. Happy New Year to all.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 31, 1953

'Mr. Pennypacker' Really Arrives

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker," who took up residence at the Coronet Theater last night, is the sunniest bigamist you ever saw.

The new play is both gay and wistful as it recounts a crisis in the life of a gentleman of the 90s who believes in Reason. We find out how he has lived his theories to the hilt, and his saga unfolds with endless, unforgettably pleasurable laughs.

Gem of Comedy.

The first act curtain of the play is a gem of comedy writing. Mr. Pennypacker is late returning home this day to his eight children. A ninth youngster has joined them, with every evidence of a right to the same heritage, except for living in Philadelphia. He has only come here to Wilmington to warn "his father" of an approaching sheriff.

Pop's reaction to the interloper is a dead giveaway. So it comes out that he has another family of nine in Philadelphia where business has always kept him alternate months.

Through the second act, Mother's pride seeks consolation in the hope that he deserted the Philly wife for her, not the other way around. Mr. Pennypacker, a man of principle, refuses to tell.

In the third act it is put up to the children to decide whether Mr. P. was right or wrong.

Meredith Twinkles.

Burgess Meredith is the progressive reformer of the title. Exuberant and assured, he spontaneously argues his way out of any corner. In knickerbockers and striped stockings, he twinkles happily through the long role, making the most of Mr. Pennypacker's tendency to hold the floor.

In the second act, where his arguments begin to outweigh his wit, he is inestimably aided by Glenn Anders as the minister whose son may marry the Pennypacker daughter. Mr. Meredith makes fine things of funny lines. But Mr. Anders makes wildly hilarious comedy, often with no lines at all.

Martha Scott is pretty and fragrantly feminine as the mother of the Wilmington family. She seems inherently to know she will never outargue Mr. P. Yet she puts up a good fight for the sake of the endangered marriage.

Thomas Chalmers is explosive as an old cannon as the head of the house of Pennypacker. He objects to his son's God of Reason even more than the wife and children do. But sooner or later, even the meek stand up to his bombast.

Una Merkel has a delightfully sly way of tossing laughs into the ring without any flag waving. She is the bossy aunt who is chastened by the startling news of the new census.

Michael Wager is grandly earnest as the hopeful groom, and Phyllis Love cavorts in ecstasy like a nervous swallow as his excited intended. Of all the other children, none is more charming or as wistful as Roger Stevens, unrelated to his producer, who plays the interloping son from Philly.

It is hard to think of any reason why "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" might not go right on defending multiple marriages at his present stand, until all his children are old enough to make up their own minds on such subjects.

Journal-American

December 31, 1953

Play's Fun--Up to a Point

By JOHN McCLAIN

BURGESS MEREDITH appears in short knickers, an Oxford jacket and the most repulsive stockings possible for his role as "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker," a new comedy by Liam O'Brien which opened last night at the Coronet Theatre. And I'm afraid that's sort of symbolic of the entire proceedings.

It struck me as a highly hopped-up situation good for about one act (which it certainly was) but not sufficiently nourishing to sustain a full evening.

There is this mad middle-class household in Wilmington, Del., presided over by Mr. Pennypacker, who for business reasons spends half his time in Philadelphia. He is an exceptionally free thinker and early in the proceedings the whole establishment becomes "You Can't Take It With You," circa 1890.

Has 17 Children

Then, a little later, it is revealed that he is also a bigamist, with another large family flourishing in Philadelphia. This is the basic situation for the play and I must say they have as funny a first-act curtain as will be seen hereabouts in a long time.

Mr. Pennypacker returns from Philadelphia to Wilmington, walks into his own living room and encounters, among the Wilmington children, one of his Philadelphia brood who has preceded him on an urgent mission. He gives him a quick hello and then, after the longest double-take in local annals, says, "Boy, you belong in Philadelphia." (Well, it's funny when you see it.)

From that point forward it becomes a problem of just how much fun you can get out of the circumstance of an entirely decent citizen who has chosen to maintain two wives and an aggregate of 17 children in separate establishments. Mr. O'Brien has created a situation where one of the girls wants to marry a preacher and Mr. Meredith must therefore vindicate himself somehow in the eyes of the church.

It was here that everything seemed to bulge slightly at the seams. Despite some valiant efforts by Glenn Anders and Michael Wager, with assists from Una Merkel, Thomas Chalmers and Phyllis Love the calliope began to run out of steam.

There never was the slightest doubt that the daughter would eventually marry the minister, or that in the end Mr. Meredith would be forgiven his foibles. And it seemed to me the resolutions of these problems was something short of ingenious.

This does not detract from the sterling service rendered by Burgess Meredith. He is a forward thinker, with several thousand answers for everything, and he sustains this illusion wonderfully well through many scenes in which he is obliged to defend his principles, even in the closing moments, when one of his own children comes up with the $64 question.

Martha Scott is his wife during the proceedings and she makes the best of an unrewarding part. There are hundreds of kids in the show and, as usual, they are all superb.

"The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" will give much amusement to many people, but I doubt that there'll be enough to make it a hit.

Daily Mirror

December 31, 1953

'Mr. Pennypacker' Opens At Coronet Theatre

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The recently organized Producers' Theatre—Roger L. Stevens, Robert Whitehead and Robert W. Dowling—introduced a promising author and director to Broadway last evening, via "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker." They are respectively Liam O'Brien and Alan Schneider.

MR. PENNYPACKER is remarkable because he has two families, one in Wilmington and another in Philadelphia. The Wilmington menage accidentally learns of the existence of the Philadelphia establishment on the day before the eldest Pennypacker girl is to marry a young minister.

Mr. Pennypacker had embraced polygamy as a result of his scientific and philosophical beliefs. He is a free-thinker, Darwinian, single-taxer, feminist and chairman of a committee to bring G. B. Shaw to America. He is a lot of other things, too, that make him obnoxious to his conservative father and neighbors in the '90's.'

Mr. Pennypacker is amazed to discover that the members of his family, all instructed in the liberal tradition, do not approve of his unorthodox conduct. Somehow, he thought they would understand his desire to increase the population of the U. S. Seventeen children between the two families he considers a heroic achievement.

CRESTFALLEN when his Wilmington household expresses chagrin at his behavior, he perks up a little when the family votes to admit him back into the circle. Like Galileo, he thinks his views will eventually prevail in the future—perhaps around 1960.

The trouble with "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" is that it argues theological, scientific and philosophical concepts in terms of smoking-car humor. It is a one-joke farce that becomes tedious as the changes are rung on it, and on occasion even offensive.

Burgess Meredith labors valiantly to make the peripatetic Mr. Pennypacker something more credible than a musical-comedy character. Martha Scott brings her charm to his harassed Wilmington spouse. Thomas Chalmers, as the irate father, roars and knocks the varnish off the furniture with his walking stick.

UNA MERKEL, a fine comedienne, has little to do as a sympathetic aunt. Glenn Anders, one of our better actors, is forced to etch a sorry caricature of an eminent divine. Phyllis Love is properly distraught as the daughter about to be wed. Michael Wager gives a commendably restrained and effective performance as her betrothed. And there are several talented and likable youngsters in the cast.

Young Schneider has staged the new arrival at the Coronet with all the hustle and bustle of a 4-alarm fire, doubtless in an effort to cover its essential shallowness. Ben Edwards has designed the period setting and costumes.

Many first-nighters found "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" to their liking. The applause was appreciative and the laughter hearty. We regret that we could seldom share their enthusiasm. For us, it proved a tasteless and unrewarding evening of theatre.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

December 31, 1953

THEATER

'Mr. Pennypacker'

By WALTER F. KERR

"THE REMARKABLE MR. PENNYPACKER," which came to the Coronet Wednesday, is a turn-of-the-century jest about a sportive fellow who has twice as many progressive theories, twice as many wives and twice as many children as anybody else. Liam O'Brien's comedy has a happy period flavor and a sound comic outline. What it needs, I think, is about twice as many laughs.

• • •

Not that there aren't outbursts of merriment in this history of a cheerful bigamist. Toward the end of an uphill first act the Pennypacker brood which makes its home in Wilmington, Del., is suddenly and unexpectedly visited by one member of an even larger brood nesting in Philadelphia. As Burgess Meredith, playing the busiest father in contemporary farce, casually greets this slightly displaced son ("Hello, Horace") the evening's basic joke erupts with a bang. And his subsequent dismay as he counts off the Wilmington bunch only to realize that its numbers have been embarrassingly increased brings the curtain down on an encouraging roar.

There are other rewards in this brightly staged and colorfully mounted cartoon. The eight local Pennypackers tumbling up and down the family stairway, diving into the woodwork when an irate grandfather appears, or marching in like a kangaroo court to pass solemn judgment on their errant old man are an invariably engaging lot. Director Alan Schneider has handled them beautifully, and Ben. Edwards has designed them an attractively gaslit bandbox to romp around in.

• • •

Once author O'Brien has let his lone cat out of the bag, though, there isn't much left to do but make noisy explanations.

Pa Pennypacker is a conscientious progressive—he is a member of the Darwin Club, the League for Women's Rights, and the Society to Bring George Bernard Shaw to America—and he must make his position clear to an appalled wife, a fainting sister, a nervous clergyman, his own apoplectic father, and each of his children in turn.

Bits of this are lively stuff (the clergyman is reduced to a perspiring idiot, one of the children is enthralled at the prospect of being genuinely illegitimate) but all of it is earnestly repetitive. Mr. O'Brien has found a funny attitude for his righteous lawbreaker, but he has not really thrust him into progressively hilarious situations. Nor has he written him speeches which will keep the whole thing rolling on wit. The play stops pretty often to catch its breath, and when it is ready to let rip again it must start at the same thrashed-over point.

• • •

If Mr. O'Brien's bons mots are lacking in the necessary exuberance, the performers are spilling over with it. Burgess Meredith, trotting about in tan shoes, striped socks, and what were once known as knickerbockers, puts his lyric growl to work with admirable energy. When he is convincing a minister that Christianity began as an underground rebellion like his own, when he is offering his wife a small bouquet as adequate compensation for his marital irregularities, or when he is herding his sleepy youngsters home, he is plausible and appealing at once. But he must work awfully hard to keep the machinery oiled and the play pumping to its fortuitous conclusion.

Martha Scott makes a fine mother for eight of Mr. Pennypacker's seventeen bequests to the future—placid as the children bang in and out of double doors, confident whenever her husband's integrity is questioned, fetchingly feminine as she takes comfort in the thought that she may, after all, have been the "other woman" in an affair.

• • •

Michael Wager is particularly effective as a minister's son who doesn't expect much of life—the best parish he can hope for is that of St. James the Less—but who finds himself filled with admiration for a Pennypacker daughter's bare feet. Thomas Chalmers and Glenn Anders draw their caricatures of the older generation in broad, and sometimes stimulating, strokes. And it's good to see Una Merkel again, this time as a palpitating spinster with a streak of sound common sense.

New York Post

December 31, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Man Who Had Two Families

Serious students of social matters may be interested to learn that there is a definite trend in amusement circles toward the defense of bigamy. First, there was the British movie called "The Captain's Paradise," which celebrates the joys of that ancient institution. Next came a sympathetic film drama frankly entitled "The Bigamist." Now the stage, a little belatedly, as is its custom, offers Liam O'Brien's "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker," which arrived at the Coronet last night and shows Burgess Meredith as the father of a couple of large families.

It is quite a funny comedy, too, with a lot of good, hearty laughter in it. I thought it was pretty long in getting started, and there were times when I suspected that it might have been helped by a few songs and dances, especially in the first act. But once Mr. Meredith has arrived on the scene as an idealistic and practicing radical of the nineties, with eight children by one marriage in Wilmington and nine by another in Philadelphia, the hilarity gets started, and, on the whole, things go along rather happily thereafter.

Comic Alertness

I still feel that the play has the aspect of a musical comedy with the music left out, but there is enough humorous invention to keep it alert and festive. Of course, it leaves no doubt that its approval of bigamy is entirely theoretical. Mr. Pennypacker, the late nineteenth-century defender of Darwin, Shaw, Ibsen and Henry George, has all the good arguments for the two-family system throughout most of the comedy, but, in the last act, he finds he hasn't been behaving as splendidly as he had suspected. And, luckily for him, one of the wives has conveniently died.

The play is enormously aided by Mr. Meredith's playing of the ambitious father. A skillful comedian, as well as an immensely ingratiating actor, he handles the role with a kind of fiercely stubborn and dogmatic idealism that is at once intense and humorous, and he makes Mr. Pennypacker not only a figure of fun but also a likeable and sympathetic human being. His is a fully rounded characterization that gives both zestfulness and credibility to the evening. You can believe in the bigamist as a man of principle as well as of satirical humor.

Glenn Anders

There is one other very funny character in the play, due chiefly to the acting of the expert Glenn Anders. The role is that of a clergyman, whose son is about to marry one of Mr. Pennypacker's daughters, and his efforts to adjust himself to the matter of the two families are understandably frantic. Mr. Anders makes the poor man a completely preposterous figure, but he is also irresistibly comic about it. Martha Scott, as the Wilmington wife, Una Merkel as a motherly aunt, Michael Wager as the clergyman's son, Roger Stevens as a Philadelphia Pennypacker, and Thomas Chalmers as an irate grandfather are of considerable help.

"The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker" is, among other things, a period piece, and its settings and costumes add an agreeable note of charm. I wish Mr. O'Brien had arranged for his characters to say "Don't just stand there!" a few less times, and I doubt if he had to take so long in arranging his scene and situation. But he has written a comedy that possesses both humor and likeability, and, thanks in large part to the performances of Mr. Meredith and Mr. Anders, the result is an evening of pleasant gayety.

"In the Summer House"

Daily Mirror

December 30, 1953

'In the Summer House' Opens at Playhouse

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Though "In the Summer House" has a springy, lilting title, it is really a bitter study in abnormality. This play, which Oliver Smith and the Playwrights' Company brought to the Playhouse last evening, introduces a gifted dramatist in Jane Bowles. She has the ability to fashion arresting characters and dialogue.

BUT SHE HAS something yet to learn about construction. She also seems obsessed with maladjusted people. Her Gertrude Eastman-Cuevas runs a boarding house on the Southern California coast. She is a termagant with a nasty lip for her guests and neighbors. Nothing pleases her, not ever her daughter.

Her motto is "Grit and Determination." She bawls the daylights out of the girl because she likes to dream in a shabby Summerhouse instead of painting, swimming and improving her mind. The girl appears to be not very bright, but on her part love is mixed with hatred for the mother.

So when a giddy young boarder, with eight an aversion for her own parent, seeks to replace the daughter in the affection of Mrs. Eastman-Cuevas, the intruder is accidentally pushed over a cliff to her death. There follows a double wedding. Mama Eastman Cuevas marries an amiable Mexican rancher, and daughter ar employe in a lobster bar.

* * *

AFTER A YEAR in Mexico on her husband's estate, Mrs. Eastman-Cuevas, driven wacky by her husband's large and noisy family, returns to seek peace at her seaside boarding house. She wants her daughter back, to dominate again. And when it seems that the girl is going to move to the Wild West with her husband, attempts to stop her with an accusation of murder. But the desperate trick doesn't work.

Judith Anderson is magnificent as the complex-ridden, domineering, edgy Mrs. Eastman-Cuevas. Elizabeth Ross brings sensitivity to the role of her dull, frustrated daughter. Mildred Dunnock is fine, as usual, as a loving and rejected mother who finds a measure of solace in drink. Muriel Berkson is excellent as her eccentric, extrovert daughter.

Logan Ramsey is good as the lobster-bar employe. Jean Stapleton has hilarious moments as a harried waitress. Don Mayo, Marita Reid, Miriam Colon, Isabel Morel, Marjorie Eaton and Phoebe Mackay are quite wonderful as pleasure-loving, uninhibited Mexicans.

JOSE QUINTERO has directed with a skilful, evocative hand. Oliver Smith has designed sets that catch the gay and drab moods of the script. Paul Bowles has composed incidental music of merit that serves to emphasize some of the pretentiousness in Jane Bowles' drama.

"In the Summer House" suggests to us what might happen if William Saroyan and Krafft-Ebing decided to collaborate on a play. It has flashes of bright buoyancy intermingled with sordid psychopathology. It is alternately captivating and depressing, distinguished and pedestrian.

We suspect that it seems more important than it really is. Its profundity lies more in its poetic flights than in its statement of eternal verities. Its materials are stretched tenuously. It is a thin and only intermittently effective essay into the macabre. A case of almost but not quite.

"IN THE SUMMER HOUSE"

Play by Jane Bowles; staged by Jose Quintero; costumes by Noel Taylor; setting by Oliver Smith; lighting by Peggy Clark; music by Paul Bowles; presented by Mr. Smith and the Playwrights' Company at the Playhouse Theatre, December 29, 1953. The cast:

Gertrude Eastman-Cuevas.... Judith Anderson
Molly.....Elizabeth Ross
Mr. Solares.....Don Mayo
Mrs. Lopez.....Marita Reid
Frederica.....Miriam Colon
Esperanza.....Isabel Morel
Alta Gracia.....Marjorie Eaton
Quintina.....Phoebe Mackay
Lionel.....Logan Ramsey
A Figure-Bearer..Paul Bertelsen
Vivian Constable..Muriel Berkson
Chauffeur.....Daniel Morales
Mrs. Constable..Mildred Dunnock
Inez.....Jean Stapleton

New York Post

December 30, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Drama of the Two Mothers

Because there is intelligence, perception and forcefulness in the writing and power and guile in the acting, Jane Bowles' "In the Summer House," which opened last night at the Playhouse, is a drama that demands respect and attention. It seems to me also overwrought and rather self-conscious, and I think that only in the last half does it come to proper dramatic life and effectiveness, but so impressive is the playing of Judith Anderson and Mildred Dunnock, two of our finest actresses, that there is no dismissing it as an evening in the theater.

In the advance reports, it had been noted by the out-of-town reviewers that Mrs. Bowles' play calls up memories of such eminent dramatists as Chekhov, Saroyan and Tennessee Williams, and the pundits in the hinterland were not deceiving us. But among the work's influences there was no mention of Dorothy Parker, and it is my impression that "In the Summer House" also has some of the desperate sadness of the late and too-little-appreciated "Ladies of the Corridor." For the loneliness of aging women figures in it ominously.

The Sources

This hint of similarity becomes particularly evident in the later act when the domineering but vanquished mother, played by Miss Anderson, tries to keep her daughter from leaving her by threatening to tell of a crime that she believes the girl has committed. Chiefly, though, it is the indirection of Chekhov, the admiration for zestful people of Saroyan, and the preoccupation with decadence of Williams that find their way into the drama. But, while she may be influenced by others, Mrs. Bowles has a mood and quality that are decidedly her own.

In the main, she is concerned with contrasting the two mothers of her play, the one domineering, self-centered and ruthless, the other weak, vague and fumbling. The former rules her shy, dreamy daughter without pity and apparently bullies the girl into accepting her rule. The latter is seemingly dominated by her life-loving child and finds comfort in alcohol after the girl dies. It is Mrs. Bowles' final irony that the strong woman is deserted by her weakling offspring, while her feeble antagonist finds some place for herself in illusion.

The Four

While Mrs. Bowles is chiefly preoccupied with the two mothers and their daughters, it appears that she is less concerned with them as individuals than as symptoms of modern society with its neurotic egotism, desperate escapism and mental and moral confusion. Hers is an earnest play, but there are flashes of humor in her gift for sardonic observation, and it is in these scenes that she is at her best. For much of the drama's first half, she seems almost intentionally murky, but the playwright grows far steadier in her concluding scenes.

The almost ferocious power of Miss Anderson and the brilliantly sure hand of Miss Dunnock for portraying futility are of enormous help. Here are assuredly two of the season's most impressive performances. Elizabeth Ross as the dreamy daughter, Logan Ramsay as the boy who loves her, and, in smaller roles, Jean Stapleton, as a practical waitress, and Muriel Berkson, as the other daughter, are excellent. Jose Quintero's direction is likewise of help. "In the Summer House" is far from completely satisfying, but it is never commonplace.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 30, 1953

'Summer House' Built to Last

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

An astonishing theatrical adventure is the new work at the Playhouse, called "In the Summer House."

Jane Bowles, who wrote it, may fairly be termed the most original American dramatist of her generation. Magnificently abetted by Judith Anderson and some fine supporting players, Mrs. Bowles has provided one of those rare evenings rich with provocative food for thought and conversation.

The most exciting thing about it all is the way the play is drawn, rather than what it is about. The chief characters are self-deluded and very badly adjusted to what life allots them. The drama goes beneath the surface and tells all.

Proud Woman.

One woman is proud, selfish and dominating. She nags her daughter, destroys the child's confidence. She condescends to marry a Mexican, and goes to his house to live, conveniently pushing her youngster into marriage with an ordinary, healthy boy. When the mother's marriage fails, she tries to break up the fragile tie between the young people. This struggle reveals the mother's hypocrisy to herself in a terrifying and violently dramatic finish.

The other woman is an alcoholic whose ravings have more character than her sober melancholy. She also has a daughter, an aggressively uninhibited child, close to dementia. This girl, who embraces everything and everybody she sees, is killed by the shy, jealous youngster.

The drinking mother finally understands enough to urge the girl to escape her dominating parent.

Play Goes Deep.

The play is a trail of character revelation. Despite the grim sound of the people they expose themselves in extraordinarily comical terms.

But Mrs. Bowles' fresh method goes deeper than that. Most plays tell us the surface of characters, and hint at the hidden truth which we must supply. Mrs. Bowles writes in terms of their inside essence. She leaves it up to us to assume what visible surface they expose to the world.

The chief study of hypocrisy here is in the character played with magnificent vitality and shameless tension by Miss Anderson. The woman denies all sensuous appetites. She claims to hate pleasure and admire ambition. Actually she is a chatterbox, willfully indulgent, who has lied to herself all her life to protect her own vanity.

It is a new sort of role for the star, rich with bitter comedy and strident in its pettiness. Miss Anderson, as always, makes you feel that the tide just turned whenever she comes on stage.

Subtle Performance.

Mildred Dunnock does her finest job of acting as the drinking widow. This is a free-flowing picture of a weakling who becomes quite grand over a bottle. It is honest, fleet and subtle performing.

Two other character parts add greatly to the play's dramatic revelations. Marita Reid has exuberant childish joy as a Mexican woman who goes through the play like a calliope. There is nothing suppressed about her, nor is there about Jean Stapleton's laugh-provoking portrait of a harassed waitress.

Elizabeth Ross is the frightened child, Muriel Berkson the eager one and Logan Ramsey the young husband.

Oliver Smith, co-producing, has designed a moody, workable and highly appropriate series of settings. The author's husband, Paul Bowles, backgrounds the play with some lovely music that is gay or haunting. Jose Quintero has directed with ingenuity and authority.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
December 30, 1953

THEATER

'In the Summer House'

By WALTER F. KERR

"IN THE SUMMER HOUSE," which was given a beautiful Production at the Playhouse Tuesday, is a perceptive, often poetic, yet finally oblique examination of a handful of frightened people.

Mrs. Eastman-Cuevas (Judith Anderson) sits on an oceanside porch and rasps out strenuous commands to a sullen and elusive daughter she secretly fears. Sometimes there is a break in her garrulous monologue, and she shudders at the thoughts which come into her own head.

Her daughter (Elizabeth Ross) bides her time in a vine-covered summer-house, trembling whenever she is spoken to, terrified that other people are going to "get in" at her and that she is going to have to "get out."

• • •

Two boarders arrive for the summer. One is a tremulous mother (Mildred Dunnock) who has spent her life huddled in dark corners, afraid that her slender hold on the people she loves will be broken if she approaches them too closely. The other is a daughter of quite a different stripe, a girl who is determined to make the world ten times as exciting as it really is but anxious lest others "spoil the magic."

To complete the tangled and self-tormenting group there is a boy who worries about the whole world, but admires it anyway. As he says, he "likes to see it dark."

• • •

In the two acts of Jane Bowles' new play, these urgent but impenetrable people pass one another glancingly, make fitful attempts at understanding one another, sometimes clash in sudden hatred. In the process, a series of glowing images leap into view.

There is a moment in which Elizabeth Ross snatches a couple of blossoms off a matted vine and impulsively offers them to the mother who is endlessly haranguing her. Judith Anderson's stunned bewilderment at the halting and half-understood gesture is sharply moving. There is a chilling fragment of atmosphere as Mildred Dunnock, foolishly fondling a fishing rod she doesn't know how to handle, sinks on a rock in the twilight and mysteriously senses that her daughter has been drowned.

And over and over again director Jose Quintero has linked together the evening's more incisive flashes with gentler moods, lovingly sustained. A beach party with bubbles being idly blown toward the water, a spaghetti picnic, a game of cards under a night light—all are genuine glimpses of passing life, perfectly evocative.

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What keeps Miss Bowles' play from flaring into vivid theatrical enchantment, I think, is the author's reluctance to pry beneath a painstakingly accurate surface. Though the play is a play of fears, the fears must all be nameless. At the final curtain Judith Anderson is still struggling with her memories, still dredging up new and more haunting explanations for the terror we have charted all evening.

Elizabeth Ross, a shaky little waif wandering forlornly around in saddle shoes, is an intriguing figure. But the things which have set her to locking her jaw and trembling violently are as obscure as the echoes of Miss Anderson's past. We are never permitted to know her motives, and she remains a merely intriguing figure, not a touching one.

Miss Bowles has relied on suggestion for each of her tantalizing effects—she is enormously aided by husband Paul Bowles' pleasantly hynotic musical score—but in the last analysis she does not suggest quite enough. "In the Summer House" has the lustrous surface of poetry but none of its shattering illumination.

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Co-producer Oliver Smith has designed several exceptionally attractive seascapes as backgrounds for a fragile play, and in the supporting company Logan Ramsey, Don Mayo, Muriel Berkson and Jean Stapleton acquit themselves handsomely.

DAILY NEWS
December 30, 1953

Judith Anderson, Mildred Dunnock Splendid in 'In the Summer House'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Straight out of Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard" comes Jane Bowles' play, "In the Summer House," and it has got as far West as John Steinbeck's warmly flavorsome Southern California. It is an interesting drama, brilliant at times and baffling at other times, and last evening it was given a splendid performance by Judith Anderson, Mildred Dunnock and their fellow players. The first audience was genuinely enthusiastic.

And I was enthusiastic quite a bit of the time—particularly in the opening moments, when Miss Anderson and Mrs. Bowles together established the character of a ferocious and possessive mother with great clarity and intelligent humor. Miss Anderson, as the widow of a Spanish-Californian, sits on the balcony of her seaside house, knitting like a demon, yapping at her timid daughter and being firm toward all within hearing.

"I have never permitted myself to become a slob," she announces. She hates human companionship in any form, saying, "Even my own flesh and blood saps my vitality." When an easygoing Mexican suitor offers to take her out for some chop suey she declines and commands him, "Describe chop suey to me and I'll try to imagine it." The person she seems to have greatest contempt for is her daughter, an elf who is spineless in the mother's eyes because all she wants to do is mope in a little Summer house, daydreaming and reading comic books.

The Perfect Actress.

It is a stunning beginning, and Miss Anderson is the perfect actress to play so dominant a woman. All through the play hers is a fine and full-blooded performance. But, after the beginning, the drama flashes fitfully; between several pungent and potent scenes Mrs. Bowles has allowed her drama to dribble off into wispy foolishness. Her least real character—disarmingly played by Logan Ramsey—is a roustabout boy who works in a lobster restaurant and marries the daughter. It is one of those Pelleas-Melisande affairs; her idea of wedded bliss is to play cards all night, and he is fond of looking dreamily out to sea and asking, "When you close your eyes do you see the world dark?"

But, when author Bowles is at her best, she provides excellent material for good actors. Miss Dunnock appears as a mother of the opposite type—a woman who is dominated by a mad little hellion of a daughter. When this lass dies in an accident which might be murderous, Miss Dunnock becomes a lonesome drunkard. This, too, is a fine performance, often funny and often pathetic.

Has Nothing Left.

Muriel Berkson gives an electric impersonation in her few moments as the possessive and lunatic daughter. Elizabeth Ross is steadily shy and pathetically childlike in the role of the girl who likes to mope in the Summer house. Personally, I think this character is purely a drip—but you can put this down to prejudice if you like.

The story involves Miss Anderson's marrying an amiable Mexican and all his excitable relatives. She goes to Mexico and after about a year discovers that the one person she loves is her daughter. So she comes back to Southern California to resume possession of this elf, but at the end the elf summons enough personality to run out on her Ma and follow her dreamer-boy husband to St. Louis. Thus, a possessive woman is tragically left with no possessions.

The drama has been admirably directed by Jose Quintero and handsomely mounted by Oliver Smith. There is a wonderfully funny performance by Jean Stapleton as a restaurant slavey, and Don Mayo and Marita Reid make an engaging pair of Mexicans.

The New York Times

December 30, 1953

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

"In the Summer House," put on at the Playhouse last evening, is a gifted drama that is brilliantly acted but that never quite breaks loose from its own inhibitions. It it the work of Jane Bowles, who can write with sensitivity and humor about neurotic people in a vulgar world. As a rootless woman of middle years, Mildred Dunnock gives an ingratiating performance; and Judith Anderson is magnificent in a highly complex role.

Is it enough to present one aspect of life with insight into the motives of a handful of drifting people? Perhaps it is; and if so, "In the Summer House" is a satisfying theatre piece. For Mrs. Bowles begins her drama with a brilliantly written soliloquy by a vain, commonplace woman who has ferocious strength of character.

She is a widow and the mother of a colorless girl who is very inarticulate and submissive. In general, "In the Summer House" is the story of how the strong one comes to need the weak one at the end; all of it rings true and most of it is pertinent. Writing in a fluid style Mrs. Bowles has vividly described a series of characters who hover around the periphery of life and she has composed several pungent scenes.

* * *

The contrast between the exuberant, animal life of some Mexicans and the pallid life of some hyper-sensitive Americans is highly comic and illuminating. There is a rueful wedding scene that also makes some touching contrasts in character; and one roisterous scene in the second act when a waitress full of energy and platitudes tells the facts of life to the colorless little girl who is still dreaming of her mother.

Mrs. Bowles is all aware. She understands the intricacies of the human relations she is describing. The literary style reveals a gem-like brightness in the use of words. And when Mrs. Bowles is in a humorous mood, "In the Summer House" has originality and vitality.

Under José Quintero's direction, which is composed of a succession of moods, Mrs. Bowles' drama is extraordinarily well acted. Very likely, this is Miss Anderson's most versatile performance. For the woman she acts is far from simple—callous, overbearing, adder-tongued, humorless, yet helpless withal, sustained by romantic dreams from the past, unable, despite her strength, to cope with reality. Miss Anderson has absorbed these details into a towering performance of passion, scorn and fear. It dominates the play so thoroughly that the play seems frail and spineless when she is not on the stage.

* * *

As another widow, less forthright, Miss Dunnock is also superb. Ineffectually genteel in her introductory scene, she is hilariously malicious in a party scene when the widow is drunk; and she plays the more crucial scenes in the second act with unerring insight. It is beautiful work.

Elizabeth Ross as the terrified daughter, Muriel Berkson as a scatter-brained extrovert, Marita Reid as a festive Mexican widow, Jean Stapleton as a harried, blunt - tongued waitress, Don Mayo as a lazy, sensuous Mexican courtier and Logan Ramsey as a young man unused to neurotics—round out a fresh, interesting performance. In his designs of a beach house, a beach and a seaside restaurant, Oliver Smith has given substance to the dark yet humorsome moods of the play.

There remains the necessity of saying something about the effect of the play as a whole. "In the Summer House" seems curiously ineffectual when the final curtain comes down. Nothing much has been accomplished; nothing decisive has been said. Excepting the humorous scenes, the play never escapes very far from the neuroses of the characters. The writing is sensitive, the acting is clairvoyant and forceful; but "In the Summer House" leaves one theatregoer with a feeling that the material has not been molded into anything of real value.

Journal-American

December 30, 1953

Judith Anderson Superior to Play

By JOHN McCLAIN

REGISTER herewith a reserved nod for "In The Summer House," the new play starring Judith Anderson which bowed in at The Playhouse last night. It is a constantly absorbing and intelligent piece of literature and it gives Miss Anderson ample opportunity to display her talents in a modern role; it has moments of pathos and high humor. But it also has its jarring weaknesses and irrelevancies.

It struck me as a cool and incisive study of a matriarch, but rendered entirely too easy because of the ineffectual quality of the characters surrounding her.

Jane Bowles, the author has told the rather one-sided story of two mothers and their mixed-up daughters all seeking escape from loneliness. In so doing she has succeeded in breathing considerable life into Miss Anderson, the dominant mater, but I failed to make much sense from the situations dreamed up for the other members of the quartet.

Mechanical Figure

For Elizabeth Ross, Miss Anderson's daughter, she has created an almost mechanical figure, a speechless and retiring young woman, who comes to life only long enough to chuck the only menace to her marriage off a cliff. This menace, played by Muriel Berkson, behaves with an alarming lack of inhibition as baffling as Miss Ross's abundance of same.

Mildred Dunnock, a gifted performer, is the mother of the menace and she just frankly takes to drink after the tragedy of her daughter's death.

In the interim there is the business of Miss Anderson's ill-advised marriage to a Mexican gentleman with thousands of relatives and her daughter's union with Logan Ramsey, an engaging young man who is either going to be an evangelist or a politician and does neither.

I frankly felt no sense of substance about either daughter; the one, Miss Anderson's, had no dimension and I don't believe she could have become aroused to violence or, having done so, could have so easily settled back into the lethargy that enveloped her for the rest of the evening. The other, flying about like a frustrated ballet dancer, rewarded the audience only with a sigh of relief when it was announced that she had been nudged off the precipice.

But this does not nullify the prodigious performance of Miss Anderson. There is a lot of oblique talk in this little bijou, some symbolism and such, but when Miss A. is on hand she manages to pull it all together and make it seem real.

Miss Dunnock's problem, that of the other mother, was never entirely clear to me but I will give her a large citation for effort.

There is a memorable scene in the second act with Jean Stapleton, for example. And in that connection it should be noted that here is an extremely capable commedienne, Miss Stapleton.

Also worthy of accolade were the performances of Logan Ramsey as the boy, and Don Mayo, as Miss Anderson's Mexican groom.

The proceedings are presented with brilliant polish by The Playwrights' Company and there is some agreeable incidental music by Paul Bowles, husband of the author.

You may not understand the play, or agree with it, but you'll enjoy Judith Anderson.

"Sing Till Tomorrow"

New York Post

December 29, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Short, Sad Life of a Druggist

Unless something fairly spectacular occurs within the next few months, Jean Lowenthal's "Sing Till Tomorrow," which opened at the Royale Theater last night, is in danger of going down in the records as the most inept play of the season. It's the oddest, too, but the eccentricities it reveals are rather less striking than its fantastic ineffectuality as a drama. As an added note of impressiveness, the acting is about on a level with the writing.

The point of Mr. Lowenthal's play seems to be that a druggist's lot is not a happy one. Although the author calls his brain child "Sing Till Tomorrow," he might possibly have entitled it "Death of a Druggist" or, conceivably, "Desire Under the Pharmacy." I suggest these alternative names in a hopeless effort to indicate what it is about, but I do so with many excuses to Arthur Miller and an embarrassed kowtow of apology to the memory of Eugene O'Neill.

Ideals of Service

The drama had been reported in advance as dealing with the druggist's "bewilderment at the apparent crumbling of his ideals of service to the community." I see no reason to change this description, save to express my own bewilderment over his surprise in the matter. Since he had a charming way of driving potential customers from his store by wordy insults and turning on all his friends, the collapse of his prestige seemed quite understandable from where I was sitting.

Anyway, the druggist was fond of fishing and on one of his expeditions he met a young woman and married her. He also had a son who wrote a play that treated his father harshly. The wife has an amorous eye on the son, and, when their affair breaks up after a quarrel at the zoo, she decides to leave her husband. He tries to sell his store, but when he can't get $70,000 for it, he is so annoyed at the "crumbling of his ideals of service" that he goes mad.

Some Confusion

There are a number of mild causes for confusion in the course of the glum narrative. For one thing, the husband had a way of calling his wife "son," which I confess confused me a little. For another, some of the dialogue was indistinguishable last night, although, from what I could understand from time to time, this was no grave loss. Indeed, there were occasions when it appeared that Mr. Lowenthal was trying the interesting novelty of writing an entire play in double-talk.

The cast of this sad saga of a druggist is composed of players not well known on Broadway or entirely new to it. There are, as we are finding out all the time, many unknown actors in this vicinity who are extremely competent, but I fear these are not among them. Only Wolfe Barzell, in the small role of a long-suffering real estate man, revealed the touch of the pro. The only other professional aspect is Ralph Alswang's set. I didn't like "Sing Till Tomorrow" very much.

"SING TILL TOMORROW"

Play by Jean Lowenthal; staged by Basil Langton; setting by Ralph Alswang; presented by Dorothy Natter at the Royale Theatre, December 28, 1953. The cast:

Evie.....Eileen Ryan
Hank.....John Marley
A. J. Alexander..Raymond Bailey
Dan.....Michael Sheehan
Fred Lyon.....Edward Cary
Nick Di Giorgio...Ted Campbell
George Faulkner.....
Maurice Brenner
John Lowery.....Arthur Oshlag
Sue Alexander..Virginia Bradley
Jake Levin.....Wolfe Barzell

Journal American

December 29, 1953

Just Double-Talk

Actors Try Hard But Can't Win

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE is no opening curtain in "Sing Till Tomorrow," a new play which opened last night at the Royale Theatre; at a certain point several characters walk onstage and begin talking to themselves and one another, and as the evening wore on I became more and more convinced that they were merely a group of rather eccentric passers-by who sought refuge from the rain.

This is unfair to passers-by, however, for on second thought I cannot imagine any accidental group which could sustain so much double-talk for so long. I tried, so help me, but when father called his wife "son" for the second time I got a little fidgety.

I figured the actor was blowing his lines. This persisted through the remainder of the play, however, and I was forced to the conclusion that it was the author, not the actor, who had blown.

View Unaltered

Nothing thereafter altered this view. This is one of those unfortunate imponderables which occur once or twice a season. Why, during the long and painstaking weeks of casting, rehearsal and staging, was there nobody to call the whole thing off? It seems such a waste of so much time and hope.

As nearly as I could gather, which may not be at all accurate, the story concerns a neighborhood druggist who suddenly finds his life crumbling at his feet.

The business to which he has devoted himself is not worth at all what he thinks it should be; his young second wife has fallen in love with his son. And he wants to go fishing.

Well, it would have saved infinite pain if he'd just gone fishing in the first place and not done so much talking.

His business yielded a reasonable income and if his wife was going to get off with his son she would do it anyway and he might as well be happily involved with rod and reel the while.

It is unfair to judge actors on a basis of such vehicles, and so let's settle by saying that John Marley, Michael Sheehan, Eileen Ryan, Wolfe Barsell and the others made a game try.

Actors need work (as who doesn't), but it is still amazing that these concerned were able to memorize many of the lines which made no consecutive sense. You'd think they might get together and say, "What IS this all about any way?"

It says here that the author, Jean Lowenthal, is the son of the owner of a large chain of drugstores. I trust that is true because he will not survive long on "Sing Till Tomorrow."

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 29, 1953

THEATER

'Sing Till Tomorrow'

By WALTER F. KERR

"SING TILL TOMORROW" is a play with two strikes on it. One is the fact that you can't hear half of it. The other is the half you can hear.

For the new play at the Royale producer Dorothy Natter has assembled a group of players who are deeply immersed in their work—so deeply that much of the dialogue comes blurting to the surface like air bubbles—and I shall obviously be unable to report on such passages as were wholly unintelligible. I should like to record for posterity, however, the fact that at one point in the evening an actor sank into a chair, stared at his enemy, and clearly said "You have been a sornusolopia." I have it here in my notes.

As for the words which, in a quaint and tantalizing way, resembled English, the best I can do is scrape off a few samples.

The principal character is a small-town druggist who calls everybody 'son,' a practice which becomes confusing only when he is addressing his wife. This unhappy druggist is looking for a new kind of life for himself ("Pharmaceuticals are your long suit," everybody tells him, but he won't listen) and when he is really unhappy he is perfectly capable of roaring "I'm baring my chest for the town to see and etching 'anonymous' across it in acid!"

His son isn't happy, either.

"You're rocking my wagon!" he shouts at his father. The father is a quick one to take up an image, bouncing right back with: "Your wagon is overloaded with ideological manure!"

Every one in the Jean Lowenthal work is given to imagery. "We're on a fire escape me going down behind you," moans the lad. "You incline to me me like a hound," cries the pharmacist. "Right now I'm a little tan, but I still know who I am," mutters somebody.

Then there's a girl whose chief problem in life seems to be that she was required to memorize pastoral poetry at a tender age. ("It was absolute drudgery," she says).

Drudgery or no, the rhythms have stuck with her. "I have no hesitancy about my declarations," she says sweetly as she enters the picture. When she is offered a sort of trial home at the drugstore, she murmurs "I take a dim view of your blandishments." Later, when it turns out that she likes blandishments after all but cannot get the boy of her dreams to co-operate, she exits with a real crusher: "I'll go out under my own propulsion!"

There is, presumably, a story behind all this. I'm afraid clarity will hardly be served, though, by my telling you that the play contains a character who is writing a play which is, I believe, the play we are seeing, that any number of good folk go trout fishing in the footlight trough, or that an onstage fire is put out with real water while a character who falls into a stream falls into imaginary water. To crib from the style of the characters, the whole thing is quicksilver underneath your feet, and the only thing I was sure of all evening was that Ralph Alswang's set was worth $33,000. I'm sure of this because an appraiser came on in the second act, announced that it was so, and stuck to his guns.

As a play, "Sing Till Tomorrow" is so bad that it utterly defeats the sporting instinct to compare it with miseries of the past. All we can do is remember the date—Dec. 28, 1953—and start all over again.

Daily Mirror

December 29, 1953

'Sing Till Tomorrow' Has Opening at Royale

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Some earnest people gave their best Monday evening at the Royale Theatre to project a well-meaning opus called "Sing Till Tomorrow." But this confused and pretentious drama by Jean Lowenthal thwarted their diligent and dedicated efforts. It also defined futility and frustration for some of us first-nighters.

LOWENTHAL, WE think, has tried to pen something of a paraphrase of Arthur Miller's eminently successful "Death of a Salesman". He wants to get over the idea that living by false values usually spells defeat in the end. His major character is a windy bore named Hank Hellman.

For years, Hank has run a drugstore in Philadelphia. He has run it into the ground. He is so busy tooting his horn, posing as a big shot and chiseling fishing trophies that he doesn't give enough attention to business and his family. His son writes a sarcastic and revealing play about him, and his young second wife finally gets wise to his emptiness.

So he tries to sell the drugstore, and discovers it isn't worth very much. The good will on which he had placed such stock isn't worth a hoot. His phony dream world comes crashing down around his ears. It is a bitter and muddled play. Its dialogue alternates between the flowery rhetoric of a stump speaker and the high-falutin' verbiage of a precocious, moonstruck schoolboy.

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ITS PEOPLE ARE depressing and irritating. We just couldn't work up much interest in, or sympathy for, them. And our ears still ache a little from the impact of Lowenthal's pseudo-poetic and symbolic speeches. Good intentions can sometimes be very taxing.

John Marley plays the aggressive and annoying Hank with sincerity. Eileen Ryan and Michael Sheehan labor valiantly as the slap-happy windbag's disillusioned wife and son. Raymond Bailey, Edward Cary, Ted Campbell, Maurice Brenner, Arthur Oshlag, Virginia Bradley and Wolfe Barzell do better by other roles than they deserve.

Ralph Alswang has designed a gloomy setting, and Basil Langton has directed in a way to emphasize the arty pompousness of it all.

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WE CANNOT understand why producer Dorothy Natter thought "Sing Till Tomorrow" worth presenting on Broadway. It would have been wiser to have tested it in an experimental theatre. Such a tryout might have saved all those involved both money and time.

Our sympathies are always on the side of newcomers. If our theatre is to survive, we need them. So it is with regret that we tell you "Sing Till Tomorrow" adds nothing to the stature of the drama. Let's record it as an honest mistake.

The New York Times

December 29, 1953

Literary Maze

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since no one critic could handle a play like "Sing Till Tomorrow," unassisted, your correspondent prudently sought the assistance of Alan Dent, critic of The London News-Chronicle. But even though we pooled our knowledge, experience and hopes of a better life, we could not make head or tail of Jean Lowenthal's play, which opened at the Royale last evening.

It has to do with a drugstore proprietor who likes to go fishing, his son who has written a play and a trollop who comes between them—or something. But what these things have to do with each other is more than the combined resources of two critics working in tandem can explain. "I can see no magnificent meaning jumping out of this a'tall, a'tall," said Mr. Dent, quoting Sean O'Casey. "Sing Till Tomorrow" is solemn gibberish.

And what can one say about the performance? Eileen Ryan as the temptress has a good profile. That's about all one can say about the performance.